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# INAUGURAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED TO THE MEMBERS

OF THE

University of Durham Medical Society

ON

THURSDAY, THE 17TH NOVEMBER, 1887,

BY

GEORGE Y. HEATH, Esq.,

M.B. (Lond.), F.R.C.S. (Eng.), D.C.L. (Dunelm),

PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY.



Newcastle-upon-Tyne :

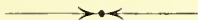
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## INAUGURAL ADDRESS.



DR. NESHAM AND GENTLEMEN,

I have first most warmly and heartily to thank Dr. Nesham for the exceedingly kind and flattering terms in which he has spoken of me to-night. Really, I was so perfectly unprepared for such an eulogium, that I do not know how to reply ; but I am afraid that Dr. Nesham by his glowing description has raised expectations which may not be fulfilled. However, you must believe me when I tell you that I appreciate most keenly your action in choosing me to be President of your Society. When your excellent Secretary, Mr. Atkinson, called upon me with the request that I should act as your President during the ensuing session, I felt that in asking me to fill so honourable and responsible a position you paid me a very high compliment. But I also felt that the calls upon my time were so numerous, my professional avocations so exacting, and the work of the College so onerous that I hesitated to accept your kind invitation. On understanding, however, that I should not be expected to attend constantly at your meetings, I thought I might profit by your kindness, and might be able to be present sometimes and act as President.

I have so seldom addressed students, except in class-rooms and on medical subjects, that I have experienced great difficulty

in coming to an opinion as to what the nature of my address should be.

It would have given me great satisfaction to have spoken to you at length upon a subject which has engrossed much of my own time and thoughts of late—I refer to the new departure that is to be made at our new College by the founding of a chair of Comparative Pathology, and by the extension of the department of Public Health ; but these matters are in too inchoate a condition at present. However, in a leading article in the *Times* of to-day, I have chanced to come across remarks illustrative of the utility of Sanitary Science, and touching also another point which has occupied my attention relative to the College, which make me wish at least to mention these subjects to you. I do not know whether the gentlemen present had the opportunity of listening to the speech I made at the luncheon, after the laying of the foundation-stone of the new College ; but if they did me the honour of reading my remarks as they appeared in the local press, they would remember that I mentioned that a College of Medicine might be of immense utility in the district in which it was situated ; and that I drew attention not only to the advantage to be derived by the public in the way of prevention of disease by the wide dissemination of knowledge from a department of Public Health, but also to the benefit public school teachers might obtain from attending the course of instruction in Elementary Anatomy and Physiology, and art students from the course of Anatomy. Well, with your permission, I shall read to you what the *Times* says upon the same subject :—“ It would seem to be an obvious proposition, were it not so commonly overlooked, that the guidance of education should rest upon the Science of Physiology, the Science which deals with the structure and functions of the several organs of the animal body.” And again :—“ Unfortunately, many of those who are actively engaged in the superintendence of education are not acquainted with even the rudiments of Physiology, and seldom appear to be aware of the assistance which they might obtain from a more extended knowledge in this direction.”

Those extracts so completely backed up what I said that I could not forbear bringing them to your notice. I had also stated on the same occasion, while speaking of epidemic diseases, that cholera no longer visited these shores, that while it had been quite recently in Naples, and other parts of Italy, there had been no attack of it in this district for 30 years or more. Nevertheless, it still continued to have its home in India, and I said that I thought it was to the discredit of the Government that it should be so. Now in the *Times* account of the speech of Sir Douglas Galton to the Society of Arts, they would find these words—"Dealing with quarantine, he referred to the discussion of the subject at the International Hygienic Congress at Vienna. Without arriving at any conclusions as to the extent cholera contagion might be conveyed, the discussions at that Congress showed the universal prevalent opinion to be, that quarantine was ineffectual to stop the march of cholera; but that its progress was determined entirely by the insanitary conditions it met on its way."

But the remark was made—"You English have, by your sanitary improvements, prevented cholera from gaining a foothold in England; why do you not attack it in its birthplace, and prevent it from springing into life in India? If your Indian ports were not affected with cholera, quarantine against India would fall of itself. We might well ask ourselves why we had done so little for the sanitary improvement of the Indian populations. It had not been for want of knowledge. In 1860 a Royal Commission, presided over by Lord Derby, made several recommendations. Sanitary Commissions had been appointed, and they had collected in 25 years a vast mass of information which all pointed one way. Where there was damp, dirt and bad water, cholera, as well as the still more deadly fevers, throve; when these favouring conditions were wanting, cholera and many other preventible diseases did not exist." So far Sir Douglas Galton. Again in the leading article to which he had referred, you may read—"We are told if we would exclude cholera from our Indian ports, quarantine, on vessels leaving them, would no longer be asked for. We cannot

plead that the measures which are effectual in temperate climates, would be ineffectual in India ; because we have applied them with marked and even extraordinary success to English troops serving in our great Dependency. The causes of the spread of cholera in India are so numerous and so complicated, that they have always seemed to defy investigation ; and the observations made there have generally led to nothing more practical than a succession of confused and confusing hypotheses." These remarks occurring in the *Times*, whose influence is so wide-spread, and which is so sagaciously conducted, agreed so closely in spirit with the ideas I had endeavoured to express when speaking on the subject of the Public Utility of a College of Medicine, that I could not refrain from bringing them to your notice, being sure that as students of the College you would not fail to be interested by them.

I shall now leave this matter and turn to what, to-night, on this first meeting of your session, may be nearer to your thoughts, and endeavour to point out some of the ways in which a Society like yours may be of use to its members, and indeed to the College in which it exists.

Your attendance at this Society, and participation in its work, ought to assist you materially in attaining what should be the principal object of your student life, viz., the acquisition of such a genuine knowledge of your profession as shall enable you not simply to pass examinations, but to enter into practice with the confidence that your services will be beneficial to society.

The acquirement of a true scientific knowledge should be the one object overriding all others, I might almost say, the passionate desire of the student. To satisfy this desire you will need much patient and untiring energy, for my own experience of many years has taught me that science requires and demands as attentive and as assiduous a courtship as any other member of her sex. I do not speak of a complete knowledge of Medical Science, such a thing is impossible of attainment in a course of four years' study, nay, even in a lifetime.

But you may ask, how would your Society tend to such a result ?



Let me illustrate my meaning. Let us suppose that one of your number undertakes to read a paper on a certain subject,—lockjaw, for instance.

Suppose that he is an advanced student of fair intellectual power, or perhaps of large intellectual power, even so, he would not care to come before his fellow-students to read a paper to be criticised and commented on, with merely the knowledge already floating in his mind. As a prudent man he would read specially for his paper, he would search the text books, hunt up the experiments performed to elucidate the subject ; he would consult the special essays ; look up his notes of cases ; and, if there happened to be such a case in the Hospital at the time, he would watch it carefully and note down, from his own personal and accurate observation, the phenomena exhibited. Having thus furnished his mind with all the knowledge available to him, he would bring his paper before the Society, prepared to receive all the darts and arrows his fellow-students might cast at him.

His work done, his paper written, read, discussed and criticised—must not his knowledge so laboriously gathered, let us say so luminously reproduced, remain indelibly impressed upon his mind ?

The same remarks would apply to those who discussed the paper. Listeners, too, their attention fixed by graphic description, impressed by cogent argument, replies and counter replies, and sparkling repartee, would perhaps realise, the meeting over, that their minds retained more information than after a similar amount of time spent in reading at home.

Advantage, I think you will find, Gentlemen, is sometimes gained when the proceedings take the form of a pre-arranged discussion. Our suppositious friend, for example, might have adopted the old view that Tetanus is the result of a mechanical irritation of an injured nerve filament propagated along its trunk to the spinal cord, and thence reflected to the muscles by which its characteristic and striking phenomena are displayed, whilst an antagonist might have upheld the more modern, but I do not say the truer theory, that a micro-parasite—a *Bacillus*—is the active agent in exciting the irritation of the spinal cord. Thus, in the

clash of mind with mind, interest and curiosity are aroused, and discussion leads to enquiry and observation, the main factors in achieving the triumphs of science.

Before I leave this first illustration of the utility of your Society, I would strongly impress upon you the desirability of your papers being founded, if possible, on original observations, or on facts observed by others, and on well-considered deductions from these facts.

Dr. Nesham has referred to the pleasant friendships societies like this often help to form; yes, such friendships may so arise and last a lifetime, even when friends are far apart.

I have myself only recently had a melancholy experience of the strength of such a friendship. A short time ago I received a letter from an old friend and fellow-student, one with whom I had worked in connection with a Society similar to this, and even on what was practically his death-bed, this old companion had purposely written to recall himself to my memory, and to awaken reminiscences of our early friendship.

In a Society of this kind, too, you learn to know each other; there a generous rivalry is engendered, a healthy friction of mind with mind. You learn to know each other, you learn also to know yourselves, and that is often the more important knowledge of the two. You learn the extent of your powers, what you may undertake and what you may not.

There are authorities who say that you should never acknowledge failure. With that I disagree, for failure in my opinion is sometimes, and if met in the right way, one of the best things that can happen to a man.

You may not indeed think it necessary to publish your failure on the house-tops, but you should acknowledge to yourself that you have failed, and then going back upon your work, you should seek out its weak places, find where and how you have gone wrong, honestly, and without self-deception, analyse your fault and determine whether you have failed from want of power or want of pains-taking. Thus treated, your failure will be no misfortune, but may lead to more splendid success in the future than you

might otherwise achieve, or may assist to give you that knowledge of yourself in comparison with others which will deter you from undertakings where you would be doomed to fail.

In after life, too, this useful experience of your studentship, the knowledge of the nature and extent of your powers, will guard you from attempting unsuitable enterprises, help you to choose your proper line, and save you from ill-considered schemes, and from the great distress and affliction of mind that may result from rashness.

In connection with this point, you will perhaps allow me to quote some words of that too-little-known poetess, Jean Ingelow. The words are from a poem entitled "Honours," and are supposed to have been spoken by a man who went in for honours and failed.—

"To strive—and fail. Yes, I did strive and fail;  
I set mine eyes upon a certain night  
To find a certain star—and could not hail  
With them its deep set light.

"Fool that I was! I will rehearse my fault :  
I, wingless, thought myself on high to lift  
Among the winged—I set these feet that halt  
To run against the swift."

Another and important mode in which your Society should be useful, is by promoting among you, and by your means, among the students of the College generally, the formation of a sound and wholesome public opinion, which shall discourage and make impotent disorderly opposition to the legitimate discipline of the College, and to the enforcement of rules not less valuable to the individual student than to the school.—I hope I am not treading upon dangerous ground.—The best men, I mean the best in every way, morally and intellectually, will, I am sure come to the front, take their place as leaders of opinion, and influence, beneficially, all students belonging to the Society, and through them all students belonging to the College. In this way a sound, healthy public opinion will be formed in the Society and in the College. A public opinion, gentlemen, which, judging from the men I see here

to-night, will discourage idleness, will visit with reprobation anything savouring of dissoluteness, put down with a strong hand every approach to vulgar rowdyism, and ostracise paltry, mean, and ungentlemanly conduct.

Men in our profession are not frequently called upon to address great public assemblies ; few of us find our way into the House of Commons—but that is to the loss of that august Assembly—nor are we like the members of the Bar, bound to win the verdict of a jury by stirring declamation or soft persuasion. Nevertheless, Gentlemen, in your future career occasions may arise when you will find the faculty of readily expressing your thoughts of great value.

Not to speak of those larger Medical Societies, at whose meetings interesting professional topics are discussed ; you may be called upon in the various capacities of Public Officer of Health, of Union Surgeon, or, as one of a Hospital Staff, to address Sanitary Authorities, Boards of Guardians, and House Committees, or, what is sometimes a trying and nervous business, to give evidence in a Court of Justice. In all these positions you will find that your work here—the preparation and reading of papers, the practice of making careful statements of cases, the joining in discussion—will have been of service to you by giving you the habit of speaking correctly, and thus enabling you to acquit yourself with credit and success.

I do not mean that for your purposes, you need the majestic eloquence or the stately periods of a Pitt, nor yet the brilliant imagery of a D'Israeli ; still less should you veil your meaning in a cloud of words like a certain old friend of ours. What you do want is to put clear and definite thoughts into clear and distinct words, and especially to avoid the use of technical terms, or pseudo-scientific expressions.

In a Court of Justice, where your evidence is to be weighed by a Jury ignorant of professional terms, this is more particularly important. Judges indeed are usually sufficiently on the alert to detect such words, and even rebuke the witness ; indeed, I have known his Lordship a little prudish in this respect, and to fall

into the opposite error of mistaking an ordinary for a technical word. With reference to this, I may tell you an incident that occurred to myself. I was giving evidence in a railway case at Durham Assizes, and stated that the sufferer's eyes were 'suffused.' "Oh, doctor!" interjected the Judge, "don't make use of technical terms." As I was in the witness-box, and because I was spoken to by a Judge, I bowed and replied that I should endeavour to express my meaning by a different word.

But, had I been anywhere else but in a witness-box, I should have reminded my critic that the word used could hardly be considered a technical, nor even a recondite one, and that should his lordship ever condescend to read a novel, especially a young lady's novel, he would probably not turn over many pages without finding the heroine's eyes suffused with tears or her cheeks with blushes.

Let me also point out to you, that upon your words spoken in the various positions you may occupy, momentous events may hang.

At one time you may be required to plead the cause of a sick and suffering family before a Board of Guardians; at another your statements to the Sanitary Authorities may avert the impending attack of some terrible epidemic, or, again, the preservation of an ancient and useful Medical Charity from the mischievous effects of a short-sighted policy, may depend upon your lucid exposition of its imprudence.

Whilst, in the witness-box, your evidence may materially affect the amount of compensation obtained by an injured person from a Railway Company, not unnaturally a little costly (as my friend Mr. Page will allow), in responding to such claims; or, on the other hand, may be instrumental in detecting and defeating the machinations of a fraudulent impostor.

The fate of a prisoner at the Bar—his liberty, life, and honour—may be determined by your utterances, nay, on them, your own professional reputation, your character as a man of uprightness and veracity may be staked.



I have now, gentlemen, completed, though I fear but imperfectly, the design contemplated in the beginning of this address, and have endeavoured to place before you some of the advantages you should expect to reap from the working of a Medical Student's Society.

But to realize them in the way described, your work must be thorough, painstaking and conscientious, your papers prepared with care and forethought, and founded, when possible, upon facts observed by yourselves. Your debates systematized; not desultory conversations, but actual discussions constituting a real and serious treatment of the subject examined.

Each of you should feel personally responsible for the success and reputation of the Society.

In regard to what I may call its social and moral development, a pure and lofty spirit and tone of thought should permeate its ranks, animate all its proceedings, and leaven the feeling and public opinion of the College at large.

Thus conducted, influenced by such a spirit, pervaded by such feelings, your Society should prove of infinite use to you, and to the College itself, do more than fulfil the purposes herein sketched out, and assist you to form valuable habits of thought and action, which once established will abide by you through life.









